Marxism and liberalism

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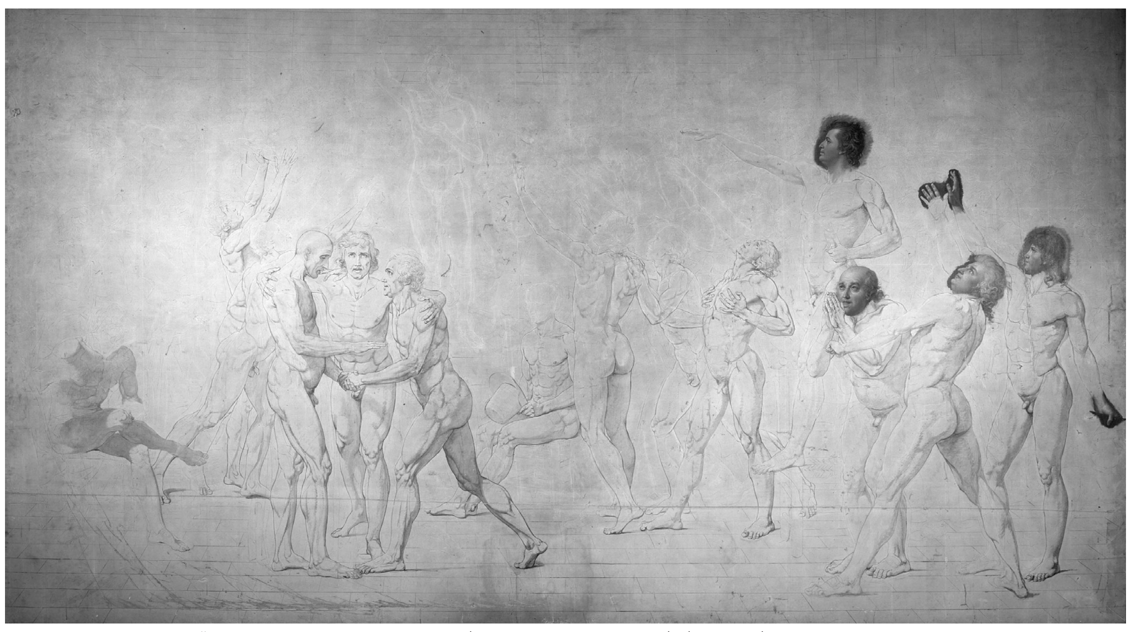

Jacques-Louis David, "Le Serment du Jeu de paume (The Tennis Court Oath)" (1790–94)

The Platypus Affiliated Society hosted the panel "Marxism and liberalism" on April 1, 2022 at the University of Chicago as part of its Annual International Convention, the video of which is available online at <https://youtu.be/KyjKMoaoH0E>. An edited transcript follows.

Opening remarks

James Heartfield: Liberalism is always in crisis, and necessarily so, because it's contradictory in the sense that the liberal order enshrines equal rights and freedoms as a condition of social cooperation. That's how social cooperation works in the liberal order: we are free, self-governing individuals who agree to work together. But, it generates inequality, disrupting the possibility of equality and equal freedoms. The competitive economic system tends towards a monopoly. Free market and monopoly are thus not different; one is the outcome of the other. At its heart is what Marx described as a gross inequality in the relationship of worker and employee, which is a substantial disruptive feature of the formal equality of the system. There is always this tension.

The best explanation of this is "Cold War liberalism" from about 1946 through 1990. It was massively hypocritical and dishonest, but also a robust, coherent political order. In the Cold War era there was a weaponization of liberal rights: the freedom to associate amongst yourselves, to speak as you wished, and to contract for work that you chose to do as opposed to being made to do. These became ideological weapons to marshal against challengers. Cold War ideology became a way of attacking other states that did not conform to, looked different from, or were set outside of the free West. But also internal oppositions: modest reforms of a welfare nature, workers' collectivity, or oppositional movements could readily be characterized as a threat to the liberal order, as being totalitarian. That weaponization was destructive because people got into the habit of thinking of the appeal to liberal ideals of freedom as foundationally hypocritical: people were immediately skeptical. You see this today. When you hear "freedom," you almost instinctively think, "it's a shyster trick; don't believe it." This is undue cynicism.

Whereas the tensions in liberalism were contained in the Cold War settlement, post-Cold War it's clearer that the anti-liberal strain in the liberal order is predominant. Demands for free speech sound like fascist propaganda; one thinks they probably want to shout racial epithets and burn a cross. Or, a defender of due process is seen as a rapist who wants to get off. All of the forces that would give substance to freedom, that would give a drive to important civil liberties, are weakened, whereas the skeptical response is much stronger.

The reason for this substantial difference is the defeat of the Left, ironically. In some ways, the Left is a massive critique of the liberal order. Nonetheless it gave reality to the liberal order because it was the challenging opposition. The people who campaigned and fought for free speech, the rights of association, the ability to contract freely, were largely movements of the Left. These were destabilized and wrong-footed in the later 1980s, and were demoralized by the apparent exhaustion of political opposition. It became more difficult to give substance and meaning to the struggle for freedom, rights, and civil liberties. Liberalism has become something of a dead letter. The idea of a rights-bearing subject is one that is so critiqued in postmodern, deconstructionist philosophy that apparently no educated person could ever take it seriously: "free speech, how *outré*. It's not the 1950s; clearly you are Archie Bunker." That is the problem. There is not enough oppositional force to give meaning to the struggle for freedom, and so the oppressive and illiberal side of the liberal order will tend to predominate. We're seeing a break-up of that important and valuable liberal order as a consequence.

Anthony Monteiro: I am older than most of you, and the defining decades for me were the 60s and 70s. Chicago ain't no joke. I was a graduate student here at the University of Chicago at the origin of the neoconservative movement, which was a form of liberalism in the period when Western and American imperialism were facing profound challenges on a global scale as well as domestically. I took classes with Leo Strauss, who is considered a founding theoretical figure in the neocon movement, especially its first iteration. So, Chicago is the founding ground of neoconservatism: liberalism was going to the Right, no longer making claims that it could engineer social peace and class peace à la Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the New Deal, but now was making the claim that it could lead the forces of Western imperialism in the struggle against the movements of anti-colonial liberation and socialism.

Having been here, and at the same time taking part in the black movement in Chicago, I suffered from a double consciousness, but it reflected that moment. Chicago, while not liberated from the forces of class and racial exploitation, is not the city it was 50 years ago. One example: the Harold Washington Library, perhaps one of the most impressive public structures built in the second half of the 20th century in the U.S., named after the first black mayor, himself coming out of the Left. It is a monument to him and to the struggle, which is at the same time a library.

I start with a reformulation of Carl von Clausewitz's "War is politics by other means." I rethink it in a Leninist way: "philosophy is politics by other means." Therefore the question of liberalism and Marxism is a philosophical question and a battle of which we are now witnessing the finality. Liberalism has lost the battle with what we will call Marxism, which is more than textbook Marxism or the Marxism of the Left. Marxism is the movements of humanity for freedom against the forces of imperialism, colonialism, empire, and war.

The two most impressive liberals of the late 20th and early 21st centuries are Samuel P. Huntington and his student Francis Fukuyama. Huntington wrote that, as opposed to the struggle between great powers, in the 21st century the struggle would be one between civilizations and their values. He set it up as Islam vs. the West, and he arrogantly took it upon himself to speak for Islam and the West. In his construal, Islam did not have a voice. So Islam becomes the opposition to freedom, and therefore, in the name of freedom, wars against Islamic or non-Western countries were justified. In other words, it is an appeal to the just / unjust war thesis: the West could wage wars wherever they wanted — Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, etc. — because they were just wars in the name of freedom.

But perhaps Huntington's student, Fukuyama, is more impressive than him. Appealing to what he would consider a neo-Hegelian historicism, Fukuyama proclaimed that the undoing of the Soviet Union and the European Socialist Bloc was the end of history and the beginning of man as conceptualized by liberal philosophy and ideology. Recently Fukuyama, in the *Financial Times*, asserted "the end of the end of history." One question I would ask to the liberals: does that mean an end to Hegel? Or an end to Lenin and Marx and Engels's defense of Hegel? We could talk a lot about the meaning of Hegel now.

The second part of what I will say is about Marxism. When I talk about Marxism, I'm thinking of Lenin and Du Bois.The Lenin-Du Bois synthesis brings together Lenin's theory of socialist revolution from the margins, not the centers, of imperialism — the weakest-link theory, including the colonial nations of Asia and Africa — and Du Boisism or, broadly Marxism, a theory of the struggle from within the strongest core of the imperialist world system. The two make for a powerful philosophical-ideological answer to the predatory, self-serving theorizing of modern-day liberalism, e.g., that of Huntington and Fukuyama.

This is why the struggle for peace and against imperialist wars is important, and why we, the Left, cannot be hesitant in where we stand vis-à-vis aggression, especially that led by the U.S.

The anti-racist fight, central to the struggle for progress and for the working class, cannot go forward without the struggle for peace. This was one of the great insights of Martin Luther King,

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Statement of purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes Leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of Leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

Submission guidelines
Articles will typically range in length from 750–4,500 words, but longer pieces will be considered. Please send article submissions and inquiries about this project to editor.platypusreview@gmail.com. All submissions should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

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About the Platypus Affiliated Society
The Platypus Affiliated Society, established in December 2006, organizes reading groups, public fora, research and journalism focused on problems and tasks inherited from the "Old" (1920s–30s), "New" (1960s–70s) and post-political (1980s–90s) Left for the possibilities of emancipatory politics today.

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revolution was to facilitate liberalism's realization and self-overcoming. The change that bourgeois ideology demanded was its own self-overcoming. So, Marx and Engels took up liberalism in order to critique democracy, to push democratic politics so that it might prove adequate to its own condition of possibility, the self-contradiction of bourgeois society, thereby transcending both liberalism and democracy. Through democracy's critique, Marx and Engels sought to achieve a dialectical Bonapartism, which, in turn, they saw as mediated in and through the newly emergent and specifically proletarian political forms — in the abortive refoundation of the Communist League, in the First International, in the experience of the Paris Commune, in the formation of the SPD[7] in Germany, and in the Second International. The revolutionary realization and overcoming of bourgeois society had to be mediated by non-identical proletarian political forms.

What can we learn from this today? For some century or more now, we have had state capitalism, which the socialist workers movement built but could not take responsibility for. To the point now that, understood conceptually in terms of enabling a practical and conscious address to the problem of capitalism, it is unclear that the Left is to the Left of the Right. We have lived through a century of historical regression, of progressive illiberalism, of war, of counterrevolution. In the Russian Civil War, Lenin and Trotsky led the masses in waging war for freedom. Today politics itself is perceived as violence, and the Left is conducted in the name of harm reduction. This occasions the ostensible Left's total abandonment of the bourgeois revolution's project of overcoming all fixed tradition and instead intending to institute a new caste society. Whereas in 1979, the Left in Iran, Poland, the U.S., China, Britain, and around the world ceded the revolution to the conservatives in the sense of being somehow outflanked, today it seems intent upon subduing the very project of historical freedom, of liberal freedom, from its ranks. Jefferson, Lincoln, integration, universality, and the Bill of Rights have all been forced into the hands of the avowed conservatives, who, for their part, regard them merely as tradition. Yet, even in this, we recognize the reposing of the question of socialism or barbarism, since, after all, the first impulse of revolution is the conservative impulse to save society.

Responses

JH: Anthony and Benjamin, you separate too much the progressive side of liberalism from the regressive development of capitalism. Without the ability to speak freely, to organize independently, to contract freely, to work without formal compulsion, to elect your legislators, there is no socialism — it's impossible. There is no possibility whatsoever of building any oppositional movement if you do not defend those basic rights. Those rights are fundamental to any human prospect.

I can understand wishing to relegate the prostitution of those things into a propagandistic ideology of social domination, but that seems to me wrong in the sense that you are destroying the possibility of independent action, that anybody could act independently of the state. It can't be right that you can put liberal values, civil freedoms, or democratic rights in a box that says "degenerate liberalism that we must destroy."

AM: What you point out is the danger of a full-throated critique of what liberals have become. Liberals have abandoned what they took as their heritage, as their identity. I never saw those rights as belonging to them. I start with my understanding of the Black Freedom Movement. This is important because while it appeared to be upholding liberalism, the liberal bourgeoisie in this country attempted to appropriate it and still do, e.g., saying "Martin Luther King was nothing but a liberal," when he was more than that. He did for democracy in this country what the liberals for more than a century refused to do: the fight for racial equality. A starting point for us is to understand what Du Bois meant when he said the problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color line, i.e., the crisis of 20th century American liberalism will be the color line.

It's a matter of how we understand our own history. We have a history in this country which can be abandoned in the name of understanding "Marxism." Marxism lives to the extent that it informs, directly and indirectly, the movements of people.

There's no city in this country like Chicago. There's a whole thoroughfare named after Ida B. Wells. Now, you could say that's a concession of liberals to the Black Movement. No, that's the Black Movement's imprint upon American politics and society. To see this as the doing of liberals, even black liberals, is to misunderstand what it took to get that. It's almost the equivalent of a street in Germany named after Karl Marx. There's a reason why Leningrad is today Saint Petersburg — those names mean something. The Harold Washington Library is a monument not to the liberals "conceding," but to the black masses, proletariat in their majority, saying this is necessary, and we'll move forward having won this.

I agree with you. We can go back to the 18th century. But even the best of the best liberals were not prepared to fight to end slavery, which was to end a backward form of capitalist exploitation. It took a different kind of struggle. Implicit in all of this is a pushing beyond capitalist relations of production, and doing for democracy what the liberals would not do. I don't take any of it for granted — freedom of speech: if they want to attack it, we'll keep on fighting. They conceded nothing. Martin Luther King was not their champion. The liberals were uncomfortable with his opposition to the war in Vietnam, and his joining of the Civil Rights Movement, the Peace Movement, and the working class movement.

A revolutionary attitude to the liberals, rather than a concessionary attitude towards them. I treat them with utter contempt, given their current record.

BS: If anybody got the idea that I don't like free speech, that's not what I'm saying. I'm saying liberalism is three things: the individual, the market, and pluralism. If you attack either of the first two things, liberals accuse you of opposing the third. I'm for pluralism, and to have pluralism in a society you have to have things like free speech, freedom of assembly. I want a non-liberal account of pluralism. We live in the West, we think about the Western tradition, but there were pluralistic states in antiquity with respect to religion, philosophy, beliefs. It is possible to be a pluralist without embracing individualism and the market. But any time you try to separate those things out, liberals force you to put them back together. Any time you try to express a desire to go beyond liberalism, you have to express it in liberal terms.

Marx was reticent to use the word "equality." Most of the time he used it to disparage bourgeois liberals who think that's all socialism is. Equality is a nebulous term. Now there are rich people who are gradually turning the word "equality" into "equity" and attaching it to racial groups. If you demand equality you should demand equity, and if you demand equity, you should demand equity among groups, and the groups that are real are the groups liberals recognize — races not classes. Intellectuals end up spouting the same lines, because intellectuals learn in environments that are controlled by oligarch money, where they think these terms are all that can be used. There's a lost history of political thought here: there are alternatives to liberalism that are not totalitarianism. The positioning of liberal vs. totalitarian hides the bulk of the corpus of political thought — non-Western, ancient, and medieval.

SL: It was said that liberalism is the obstacle to democracy. You could understand my remarks as flipping the script, saying that democracy is the obstacle to liberalism. An aspect of liberal thought — e.g., Hegel — isn't about rights or a preferred economic system or any set of policies, but is fundamentally about the question of historical freedom, the capacity of society to change. The essence of modern freedom is the possibility of becoming something else, something new — on the basis of what exists, there is something that we cannot foresee, and yet that is the general will of society. As the invocation of the category of the general will implies, that clarity goes back to Rousseau. It was that aspect of liberalism that I'm trying to underscore. If we just take a text that I can assume everyone in the room has read, Marx's description in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) is that, in capitalism, change is the form that the eternal return of the same takes — this gets to the question of cyclical history. The bourgeoisie plays a most revolutionary part, that all fixed fast frozen relations dissolve before they can ossify, etc. It is freedom itself in the sense of the constant production of the new as the mask for the reconstitution of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

Democracy is potentially capitalism's greatest resource — its only resource. It ultimately has to be reconstituted through the discontent that it itself generates. Marx understands democracy as conditioned by the proletarianization of society. Because everyone is threatened with obsolescence, with the prospect of falling through the cracks, because society is disintegrating even through its reconstitution, we want to make a claim politically because we might not be able to make a claim socially, to participate any other way. That's why I described Marxism as a dialectical critique of democracy — as he puts it in the *Manifesto*, a project of winning "the battle of democracy." Not "for democracy," but "of democracy." Why? To pose the tasks of the democratic revolution, i.e., to make democracy come to terms with its own conditions of possibility, namely, the proletarianization of society.

AM: Can I just ask Benjamin, what do you mean by "racial group"?

BS: Race as reified in abstractions, as being real and as being the things which constitute society. That's what liberals affirm, and I don't agree that races are real in that sense.

AM: I'm still confused. I consider myself as part of a "racial group," the African American people, who are so integrated into the overall working class, that the struggle of this racial group cannot be separated from the struggle of the working class as a whole. Is that fair to say?

BS: That's fair to say insofar as we interpret reality through the lens of that category.

AM: Let's not use that category. Let's talk about that reality or that history.

BS: Subjectively.

AM: Subjectively and objectively!

BS: Objectively would be to say that it's reality. The liberal tendency delegitimizes conceptual frames that are not bottom-up, from the individual. One of liberalism's adaptations has been to treat racial groups as real in addition to the individual as a means of pacifying dissent.

AM: We're talking about the categories developed by liberal thinkers, not categories developed by people fighting against their categorization by liberalism. We have to make a distinction. That's why Chicago is such a wonderful city: not because it is complete, but because of its contribution to the future of the class struggle. That's why I don't think we can talk about a racial group or a reified category. I'm talking about a lived history as documented by historical materialists like Du Bois in his work *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935).

JH: Is the issue here not that, through reification, the oppositional category becomes incorporated? We see it in human-resource management where it's part of daily corporate management to monitor ethnicity.

AM: That's what we call, in this country, "diversity training."

JH: It's pretty much the same in the UK. In that sense I would say yes, reification. But what you're saying is that there's an oppositional anti-racism which must conceive itself through this prism.

AM: I would agree. I was in support of the presenter yesterday who was talking about the American Revolution, but he stopped at the Civil War, and there was another American Revolution that we have lived through that has lessons, and can tell us about the future of struggle and class struggle. There were many German colleagues on the panel I was inspired by, and it was interesting for me to hear about Germany and how they saw the possibilities of struggle there. The American people are on the precipice of making history in ways that most have not yet imagined. I agree with Spencer's remark about philosophes of the people. In a period like this, all that we're talking about here will be welcomed in the day-to-day life and discussion of our working class, of our people. We're on the cusp of something new, and the "racial categories," especially the Black Freedom Struggle, will be a decisive part of that future.

BS: One of the things I worry about as a political theorist is nationalism and the conception of groups or peoples as having an essential, primordial, pre-political quality, as if they came out of ether. This plays a role in a lot of European nation-state narratives: the idea that the French are distinct from the Germans even though they're both Franks, who came into territory that was previously occupied by other tribes and peoples. Similarly in Britain there was appropriation — you might see a statue of Boudica, a Celt. The Celts were conquered by the Romans, and the Romans were conquered by the Saxons, and they in turn were conquered by the Normans and the Danes. What it means to be British is not at all to do with being primordially British, as Boudica originally embodied.

Q & A

To what extent do you think liberalism is foundational to Marxism? On Marxists.org, there are two essays from Immanuel Kant in the 1780s. In those essays he mentions not democracy but the potential to shape a constitution, and through this achieve perpetual peace. Anthony, this seems to strike against what you were saying about liberalism being the undoing of peace. It's also — I was thinking of your comments, Benjamin — not about an atomized society, but about society opening up the potential of the human. Do you think these essays should be on Marxists.org?

SL: What I was trying to say — that Marx and Engels were philosophes of a second Enlightenment — is that it's still the Enlightenment, not something new. They're very conscious of the fact that not only in the era of the rise of bourgeois society was liberalism reasserted in the face of its crises. Famously, Adam Smith calls John Locke a mercantilist. He's arguing with the revolution very deliberately. Even in 1848 and after, the revolution will appear as a bourgeois revolution and it will make bourgeois demands. All of those demands will be bourgeois, because the only way that we can name the society that we demand is as the fulfillment of the society that's in crisis. This is why I tried to provocatively say, when Marx describes socialism as a society in which the freedom of each is the precondition of the freedom of all, he's lifting it straight from Kant, straight from the liberal tradition. Perpetual peace would be another way that we would describe socialism, as a world state or system of states presiding over perpetual peace. So it is a question of realizing the highest ideals of liberalism in a way that will overcome the very basis of liberal society. About that there's in some sense nothing to say, except that there's something that lies beyond what we can politically imagine.

BS: Marx was influenced by Hegel and Kant. So, Kant plays a role in generating Marxism. So does James Harrington, Roman writers, and Greek philosophers. Liberalism drew on Plato, Aristotle, the Romans, etc. Kant shouldn't be kicked off Marxists.org, but maybe other things should be added. The history of Marxism is not just an outgrowth of liberalism insofar as liberalism is not the only thing that exists or has existed. It is using liberalism to get rid of the parts of the ancient and medieval world that prevented the emancipation of the slaves and the serfs, for the possibility of drawing upon the whole human tradition for a new, better society beyond liberalism. Marxism draws on all the human ideas in existence. Because liberal ideas are prominent, the tendency will be to try to grab them. But, one of the problems we've been having for the last hundred years or so is that every time we try to grab liberal ideas, rich people come in and twist those ideas into means of defending the status quo. It's not just true for equality, but to a significant degree freedom and liberty have fallen into this. If you learn liberty in school, most of the time you read something like Isaiah Berlin's *Two Concepts of Liberty* (1958). That's a propagandistic Cold War work designed to get you to affirm liberty as non-interference. If you read historians of thought like Quentin Skinner, he conceives of freedom as non-interference, but also freedom as non-domination, and as self-realization. Someone like Raymond Geuss thinks that Berlin collapses four different and distinct possible readings of positive liberty together and slags them all off with a critique that only applies to one narrow type. The issue with a lot of these terms is that, defined in the right way, they're emancipatory, but generally we fail to do so for political-economy reasons. They succeed in imposing definitions on us that are limiting rather than emancipating. I want to see us come up with a real form of a next society, not just an extension of these liberal concepts. We're at a material disadvantage in the war to define them.

You spoke about the heritage of the 19th century. You all referred to liberal values and the social question. It seems you're calling for democracy and a return to the social question — for social democracy. In Thomas Mann's novel Buddenbrooks *(1901), German workers are calling for a revolution and a bourgeois honestly tells them, "but you just had a revolution." Didn't we just have a social democratic turn on the Left? Most people feel ashamed to talk about it, because it didn't go well. What are we to make of this? Does this new neoliberalism and the latest upsurge of social democracy constitute an equally productive contradiction as liberalism and social democracy did for Marx in the 19th century? How far is this connected to what Platypus calls the crisis of neoliberalism and the potential advent of post-neoliberalism?*

JH: If you mean the recent social democratic turn within the last five years — Momentum, Bernie Sanders, etc. — it's an emotional roller coaster for me. I can't conceive of a reason why, but we get a sort of reiteration of past positions at an accelerated rate. It reminds me of the end of *Terminator 2* (1991), when the shapeshifting man falls in the vat of steel, and, as he's disintegrating, his adopted personas reappear in desperation. I feel like that about the extraordinary turn to the Left by the Labour Party that you felt, even as it was happening — a spectral quality, like somebody putting on a play for the second time. I didn't like to see it crash and burn. It's painful to me, because I know that it has hurt feelings, caused disappointment and negative consequences. I was moved by the Bernie Sanders "All Come to Look for America" ad (2016). You'll think I'm an idiot now, but I mean to say, there plainly was an aspiration for something beyond. Even Donald Trump understood that when he plundered aspects of the Sanders campaign. But, none of these are sufficiently grounded to make a lasting opposition, and I can't put my finger on why that is. There's got to be something more original.

Spencer talked about how the Republican Party seems to have protected some form of liberalism, albeit in the sense of a tradition which it could never be, and it has a static quality. He defended a kind of Rousseauian approach, an open-ended self-transformation at the heart of the philosophy of freedom, which he considers liberalism. When Benjamin spoke about what we ought to do, he called for the formation of a non-liberal form of pluralism. His examples were to reach back into what appeared to me a grab bag of history — ancient societies, pre-modern forms, etc. Having read Benjamin Constant's "The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with That of the Moderns" (1819) in the Platypus reading group, I'm curious to hear how history figures into your arguments. I have the impression that it's a logical problem that you've presented, Benjamin, and that you reach back to find solutions: there are thought taboos that the rich, or anyone, impose on you, and we can be freed from it, escaping into some past that we are forgetting. Whereas Spencer seemed to present a crisis of liberalism that still impacts us today in ways in which we don't understand, creating blockages for politics, action, and thought.

BS: There are terms that we get stuck in that we think of coming out of the history of thought, the 18th century, but they are more from our contemporary period. Benjamin Constant is a version of Isaiah Berlin in that he frames ancient peoples as all having rejected pluralism, as a means of clearing space for a liberal assertion of the private sphere and the individual. Constant's is not an entirely historical account. It's a persuasive opinion piece to get people to embrace his concept of liberty. Contemporary historiography and knowledge of pre-modern societies is much more detailed than it was in the 1700s when Constant was writing. Because there were numerous texts not yet translated into languages that these theorists were reading in, and many of the translations were poor quality, there were a lot of ideas and concepts misunderstood, or only partially understood by the theorists of the 1700s. I caution anybody in reading 18th century theorists' accounts of the ancient world as straightforwardly correct. Many are writing to critique 18th century aristocrats, projecting the traits and behaviors they associate with aristocrats onto the history of Rome, Greece, the medieval world, etc.

When I talk about non-liberal pluralism, I think of the old pre-liberal, imperial states that had a large amount of religious pluralism. All of them had slavery and serfdom, and so they are unacceptable as models. But we can borrow their pluralist aspect in trying to think of ways to be pluralist without having to embrace individualism and the market. We could look to Tang China as an example of a heterogeneous, kind of early state. Not to say that we can reconstitute the ancient form of society, but the set of things we can draw on is not limited to the ideas of the 18th century. There are people who want to draw a line and say, "this is modern, which you can talk about, and this is pre-modern, which is out of date, or outmoded, or can be thrown in the trash." That is a liberal propagandistic point.

SL: I completely disagree with that. I've spent much of my life reading texts in Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit. I come from a world of South Asian historians who are constantly asserting what is

undoubtedly true: the cosmopolitanism of medieval Indian society, which invited merchants from every country, including from Europe, in a way that contrasted strongly with China in terms of their ability to do business, etc. Yet when I look at the Indian intellectual tradition — and it's unique as being a highly literate society that underwent colonialism and responded to it readily — I see the enthusiasm with which Indian intellectuals immediately recognized the applicability of liberal critiques to their society. When I see those who are asserting the value of Indian civilization dismiss all liberals and all Leftists as race traitors, I'm very wary of this. More to the purpose, when liberals said that they saw in the 18th century the rot of ten thousand years of civilization, they were right. Those aristocrats did share traits with the aristocrats of previous eras. Liberalism was a critique of all of human history, and it was voiced famously, powerfully, non-trivially in the name of the freedom of the noble savage. That's not a racist gesture. Even for Adam Smith, liberalism is not about markets; it's about what he calls "natural liberty," the freedom that is natural to us, raised to a conscious level. It's not an argument about a set of policies or possessive individualism, etc. I hear a rotten critique of Eurocentrism in those arguments. The only country in the world where you're forced to read Marx and Engels is China. The liberal philosophy of history isn't parochial, and it doesn't have a specific content. At its core is the question, as Marx puts it in the *1844 Manuscripts*, that the nature of our species is to determine what our species is, that we change what it means to be human in history. That is the project of liberal freedom. The question of capitalism is that of a blocked transition to a new form of society. It's a transition pathology at bottom.

I'm surprised that no one critiqued liberalism from the perspective of its religiosity. Benjamin hinted at that regarding the unholy trinity of individualism, pluralism, and the market. My issue with liberalism comes less from Marx and more from Nietzsche: the central motivating apparatus for something like social justice is ressentiment, *e.g., the fight for black freedom. In the past few decades the liberals usurped black power with white guilt. It became their thing. This critique deserves Leftist merit because it shows that the pseudo-Left isn't doing anything revolutionary, just another iteration of secularized Christian ethics.*

BS: Spiritual traditions have a lot for us to draw on, because they situate a person as part of a spiritual community, a community of practitioners. The liberal story about the noble savage lies about the character of the noble savage by positioning the noble savage as pre-political, as an individual existing without society. An important point made by religious traditions is that to have any way of life, to create any way of being, you have to do it together with other people and that these ways of living and being have to be taken seriously. They can't be assimilated into a soft, liberal pluralism, where whenever they contradict liberalism they're to be rooted out. There's a role for religious pluralism, and certainly a role for a Left that is able to encapsulate that. On the last point, the reason that people all over the world could be liberal is that everybody objected to the exploitation which characterized ancient medieval societies. I object to that as well. That's why I said liberalism is necessary: it tears apart those institutions and structures which protect exploitation. We've got to get those structures out of the way before we can build better structures. But liberalism is an ideology of tearing down and wrecking, not an ideology of building, and it has not shown or demonstrated any capacity to build anything. That's why the anarchists are the most pernicious part of the Left, because they're obsessed with tearing things down.

JH: Benjamin did it from a different perspective, but I'd like also to defend religiosity, how people conceive of their connection to the world. I find it difficult to separate ideas of liberal freedoms from Protestant ideals. The original free speech movement was about defending the right of Protestants to hold their faith at embattled times. I'm reading this superb book by Jacob Mchangama on the history of free speech, where he makes the point that proponents of free speech, when they came into power, stripped it from the opposition — this was true of the Protestants.[8] You could say, " this shows you free speech is BS." You could lose sight of the fact that the Protestant ideals of individualism were important steps towards conceiving ourselves as having a reflective space, a private sphere from which we could abstract ourselves from obligatory social relations so that we might be able to conceive a different way of being. What kind of community would it be where you couldn't abstract yourself from it and consider "are we doing the right thing?" It would be Pol Pot-ish if you couldn't shut the door on the noise and say, "am I in the cult, or am I doing good? Are we a part of the future?"

BS: The individual is a reified abstraction, a category we use to try to make sense of reality, while the category does more harm than good. When we think in terms of the individual we end up thinking along liberal lines which result in the adoption of Right-wing positions. It is generative to think in a more complicated way. That's not to say that there isn't freedom, there isn't pluralism—I'm for freedom and pluralism. But it is possible to have a wide variety able to express a wide variety of views without fetishizing the individual as the fundamental unit of society. Liberalism inverts Platonism. In Platonism the Good is the unhypothetical first principle of all: every category or idea has to be justified in terms of advancing the Good. Because no human concept can fully capture what is good, any concept we use distorts the meaning of the good. That's true of freedom, equality, the individual, race, the nation, and every other term that we might use to make sense of society. I like to oppose the individual, because, even in a society devoted to Marxists, everybody espouses this frame. The frame constrains so much, because it reads every pluralism as liberal. That is not to throw away the legacy of liberalism. Liberalism is necessary; it is the dissolver of the previous forms of society. But, if we operate in those terms, we can't get outside. Similarly, every term that liberal theory has generated needs to be interrogated because they have been defined in ways that keep us down. I will not uncritically embrace these terms, no matter how it might warm your heart if I did that.

Benjamin, you seem to reject both individualism and nationalism. I can see two alternative arguments. The first is to elicit posthumanist theory, critique the Cartesian notion of the subject that bourgeois society embraces as a bundle of rights, and construct a notion of the subject divorced from bourgeois life, culture, and the market. The best attempt is Gilbert Simondon's notion of transindividuation. The second is a postcolonial argument, that certain modes of nationalism are justified. You don't seem to embrace this mode either. Could there be a posthuman critique of the bourgeois subject that informs a new kind of individualism?

BS: The main role of nationalism is to break apart other forms of states so that they can be partitioned and bullied by Western states. People in other parts of the world are persuaded to be nationalists, and so they divide their larger forms of pluralistic empire into smaller antagonistic units that can be pitted against each other to keep them down. Balkanization has been the main tool in the destruction of Middle Eastern and Eastern European states. Not to say that other people haven't tried to use nationalism to good purposes, in which case I would tolerate it. I'm first and foremost for the Good, and not for dogmatically sticking to a particular definition of a term. Liberalism likes to posit the individual and the collective (or nation) as opposites that need each other. We are not really individuals; we're citizens. We're parts of societies, not noble savages, or pre-political individuals or peoples with fixed cultural identities. We can be citizens in different ways. In better periods of Roman history, it was possible to affirm different gods, different religions. Can we combine that aspect of Roman thinking with the possibilities that technology, industrialization, and liberal capitalism have given us — a society without slavery, without serfdom, where you can affirm any religion you want?

SL: I appreciate James's comments about Protestantism. It's a tricky issue as to why the Enlightenment ceased to be a movement within religion, or ceased to be an aspect of the Reformation, which Hegel strongly reaffirms. In that sense it's the last moment where the question of the development of religion is in tandem with the development with reason. One of my favorite pamphlets of the Reformation is *Christianity Not Mysterious* (1696); it's got a great title.[9]

That liberal sense — that we draw strength from our sociality, that at the bottom of religion is even a non-propositional confrontation with our sociality and the reality that society existed before us and will hopefully continue beyond us. That still exists, which is why I invoked my teachers at the beginning. You can call that a kind of secular Hinduism. I'm laying the wreath on the altar of my ancestors.

Let us not parody this question of noble savagery. The issue is one of our sociality, of our freedom not being hostile to us. That's what Rousseau means: in the history of civilization, our freedom has been expressed primarily through our self-enslavement, and that we have a deep and natural capacity for freedom to transcend that, and we can see this in man's past history. It's neither a pre-political, nor isolated individual. To the extent that Rousseau's *A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1755) implies either, Smith, Kant, and others critiqued him for it. It is a question of the possibility of our sociality being the ground of our individual development.

One more thing about individualism. Individualism is really precious. It's a product of history. It's not all around us. What's all around us is mass conformity and fear. It's a generation of kids who are all told to write personal essays according to a script in a book. We're not living in a society of the flourishing of individuals. We're living in a society in which there is nothing to distinguish us from other people except for the fact that we'll go along to get along. Our conformity is an asset, and everyone knows it. This is the deep and pervasive social fear. There are times when it's extremely important to say, "I hate all these fucking people! I hate society as a whole! The whole thing feels like an imposition upon my individuality!" That's not just an abstraction. That's an absolutely fundamental resource that allows us to think and to learn. If it's an artificial product of history, let it grow. Let's create something even more artificial out of that. Let's not reject it, let's realize it.

Anthony, I appreciated your observation that a school or a library being named after a black civil rights leader was not given. This could be applied to labor. If people want to note that the mid-20th century settlement was not the communism of the 23rd century, they are fine to do that and to critique those failures. But we should never forget or take for granted how much we gained in that period. My grandfather was a lumberjack, and his son was a professor. Many of us are able to participate in an event like this because of the foundations for the middle-class that were established then.

James, you said that parliamentary representation is a sine qua non *of a liberatory society. Everyone here would say that we advocate democracy in general, regardless of how we interpret it. But it occurs to me that if we look at something like the French Revolution, democracy was not a chamber of moneyed people indirectly representing their constituents; it was done violently on the street. It was organized by the upper class to capture that institutional structure. The 20th century has been defined by significant events that one might construe as democratic, but this was a democracy of mobilization not institutionalization. The Cultural Revolution was not your representative bourgeois democracy, but there was an element of mobilization whether it succeeded or not. The inability of the Cultural Revolution to be recapitulated as an institutional form also pointed to the limitations of that movement and that moment. We tend to flatten it out, say, "Mao is just Stalin," and to treat it as a history of demobilization, because we need institutions. What is the relationship of democracy to the dialectic of institutionalization and mobilization?*

JH: I have no knowledge or understanding of the Cultural Revolution, which is not meant to be dismissive. But I am wholly in agreement with you on the question of democracy. The Constituent Assembly is the least important part. Whatever chamber it's held in, the rituals, the voting system: all of these are secondary matters. Only as a living thing is it of any account. Democracy is fabulous because it obliges each of us to make our case as individuals or as movements. While anybody can hatch any in their head, if you have to make your case to other people, you are looking for agreement, trying to put your ideas into somebody else's mind. The formulation of those ideas, in the attempt to build coalitions and movements around slogans or demands — that process is democracy. Voting is the last point, the end point, the death. I want to emphasize, because I overdid it on the disagreement, that I felt in sympathy with Benjamin's point that we should be citizens. Citizenship is a fantastic model — citizens free to worship any god or none. Similarly, Anthony's point, which is in a way the most moving, is that liberal values lived best when they were articulated by oppositional movements, e.g., when James Connolly was articulating a vision for Irish independence, which he did with full knowledge of the limitations of nationalism as an oppositional movement — as indeed is the case of the anti-imperialist movements of the 20th century. It's cheap to look at the end-point and laugh, "Look how Gaddafi ended up!" You lose sight of the reality that people in the movement gave to national liberation, and treat those movements only as the end-point of disappointment, misunderstanding the importance of those mobilizations. Obviously, the 18th century movements of national liberation were epoch changing. But the fact that it lived in a 20th century notion of anti-colonialism is fundamental. In the same way, free speech in the mouth of Frederick Douglas is more electric than it is in the prissy comments of John Mill.

In the opening remarks you all described a different appearance of something that seemed very similar, or of the same moment in history. James, you said that there is no longer a substance to liberalism without opposition from the Left, from Marxism. Anthony, you said that Marxism is defeating liberalism. Benjamin, you claimed that liberalism censors other political forms — perhaps Marxism — as totalitarianism, as "tanky"-ism, that can be rejected wholesale on the basis of liberalism itself. And, Spencer, you were describing throughout your remarks that today's "Left" and today's "Marxism" seem to be the vanguard of illiberalism and are having a disintegrative effect on liberalism itself. Do you all consider these to be different descriptions of the same moment, and if so, when did this begin? I was wondering if you all considered these to be different descriptions of the same moment and, if so, when did this begin?

AM: My point is the 20th century. Decadent liberalism, the liberalism of a bourgeoisie configured as we see it in this country, is about to have an ideological route taken against it. I'm optimistic about the possibilities of the masses of the American people, enough of them, seeking a future without the parasitism of a financial kleptocratic bourgeoisie. That's the struggle. The philosophes of the people, the tribunes of the people, are configuring themselves, and we proceed in the country upon a path of resistance too often unseen and unacknowledged. If we, the Left, can open our eyes to who our people are and what they are capable of, we can understand and imagine the future that these people are on the cusp of making.

JH: My emphasis is slightly different. I want to warn that we are in a deeply illiberal moment, whatever liberalism is up to. Maybe liberalism is the illiberal moment. It's empirical to me that both my daughters were prosecuted recently for clashes with the police — I was amazed to discover — because of the lockdown: they were in a park. That was the crime. They were quite serious about it. In London right now, people I know, because they are Russian, because they are the wrong ethnicity, discover their bank accounts have been frozen. We've commandeered the assets not of Vladimir Putin, but of Russians who live in Britain. There is no practical purpose to this, it's just race persecution. Because it's the Russian race, and they have no friends, no one recognizes that this is a wickedness. We have a police bill going through, giving the police extraordinary powers to prevent demonstrations, etc. Amongst its powers, the bill empowers Twitter and Facebook to regulate speech. It both obliges and empowers them, which is peculiar, in order to try to stop that new frontier we were excited about, where we might speak. It is a very illiberal moment. The attack on basic freedoms is profound in a way that nobody really understood, under the guise of "proper health treatment." People were locked in their homes, schools were closed, and ordinary moments of civil cooperation were canceled. I can't see this as anything other than illiberal. We have not got enough people giving force to the living freedom that we are all dependent on.

BS: The question is right. We would probably all be on the same side in a *political* discussion about what to do. This discussion has become theological because politics has replaced theology. The way you get to the position matters just as much as the position when discussing theory. We have different notions of where liberalism went wrong and the degree to which there was something good in it to begin with, beyond getting rid of other forms of society, e.g., whether Protestantism is necessary to get out of the bad stuff. Liberalism positions all that came before it as bad stuff. If Protestantism is necessary to get out of the bad stuff, how can you be a Marxist without being a Protestant? The Catholic Church ran rampant through Western Europe and subordinated politics and people's individual needs to it to an inordinate degree, and so they adopted Protestantism. In other parts of the world the state governs the Church. In the Eastern Roman Empire where the Basileus sits above the Orthodox Church, the Church's ability to conflict with the needs of society is reduced. If Protestantism is necessary, you would have to be "post-Catholic" to be a good person. I don't think that's true. There are ways of recognizing earlier, valuable orientations without wholesale taking on the bad stuff, e.g., religious traditions apart from Protestantism. The Grachi brothers of Ancient Rome fought for land reform, and the senators murdered them. The Grachi justified their resistance to the senatorial class without the need for liberalism, for Protestantism, or any particular "-ism." That is where we differ.

SL: In ways I agree with everyone, but I do think it's a question of "how you get there." I agree with Anthony's notion that there are wells of revolutionary capacity in people around us. I also agree with James, that we are in a deeply illiberal moment, and that's not trivial. I agree with Benjamin, that the project of socialism is a project of realizing the aspirations of human beings as they have been formulated up until now. There are a couple points where the emphasis is a little different. There is a false search for authenticity. The whole world is post-Catholic. Religion meant something in the premodern world that it can't mean today. It doesn't matter whether it's Eastern Orthodox, Islam, Hinduism, etc. Religion is the religion of a new form of social life. It expresses the needs of a new form of humanity or it has gone extinct as a religion. There are mega-churches in Islam, in Hinduism. A phenomenon in one religion appears across society. We live in a global society in a profound way. It is an aspect of religion that you experience the same thing that everyone has ever experienced. It is a part of being a Muslim that there is no history to Islam in the moment of submission to God. That itself is historically conditioned.

The issue is the 20th century. A questioner stated that the majority of us are the children of unfree people of one sort or another (peasants, poor people, working people), that we live in a more prosperous world today: how could anyone be anything but grateful? The question of gratitude requires us to think about the project of freedom that the past formulated, of which all of these things are an unintended byproduct. We have to think about how the struggle to overcome racism in the U.S. was an attempt to reconstitute the struggle for socialism. That's what I'm worried about. To express our gratitude, we don't have to idolize. We have to think about the compounded defeats of the 20th century as not a churlish, youthful gesture, saying, "they're fools." It's about coming to terms with the tasks that they impart to us. As I say to my students: you think you have a criticism of these people, but you never think about the criticism that the dead have of us. Talking about the history of the 20th century as the history of state capitalism is about that, the loss of the command or the ability to even contemplate commanding responsibility for the project of freedom that we have imposed upon ourselves. |**P**

Transcribed by David Faes, Desmund Hui, Thom Hutchinson, and Addison Kwasigroch.

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[1] See Bruno Leipold, "Citizen Marx: The Relationship between Karl Marx and Republicanism" (2017), for the University of Oxford.

[2] Democratic Socialists of America.

[3] Benjamin Blumberg, Chris Cutrone, Atiya Khan, Spencer Leonard, Richard Rubin, "The Decline of the Left in the 20th Century: Toward a Theory of Historical Regression," *Platypus Review* 17 (November 2009), available online at <https://platypus1917.org/category/pr/issue-17/> and <https://youtu.be/DGVuIzdHBw8>.

[4] James Heartfield, Douglas Lain, Andony Melathopoulos, Lance Selfa, "The legacy of the 1980s" (March 31, 2022), hosted by the Platypus Affiliated Society at the University of Chicago, the video of which is available online at <https://youtu.be/EG4uFkcNhHE>.

[5] Karl Marx, "Letter to J. Weydemeyer in New York" (March 5, 1852), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/letters/52_03_05-ab.htm>.

[6] Friedrich Engels, *Principles of Communism* (1847), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/11/prin-com.htm>.

[7] Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands.

[8] Jacob Mchangama, *Free Speech: A History from Socrates to Social Media* (New York: Basic Books, 2022).

[9] John Toland, *Christianity not Mysterious: Or, A Treatise, Shewing, That there is nothing in the Gospel Contrary to Reason, Nor Above it: And that no Christian Doctrine can be properly call'd a Mystery (To which is Added, An Apology for Mr. Toland, in relation to the Parliament of Ireland's ordering this Book to be burnt)* (London, 1696 (1702)).

Jr. The fight against white supremacy is not as it was conceived in this recent period, for example by the 1619 Project, which is a recouping of liberal positionality and politics. The 1619 Project says, "we want to fight racism, but let the warmakers have their way, just as long as they're woke." But without the fight for peace there cannot be a new stage in the fight against racism and for the unity of working people. The fight against racism is not a "black question," by the way: it is a broad class- and all-of-humanity question.

Such formulations as "the counter-revolution of 1776" and "settler colonialism" provide aid and comfort to a defeated liberalism. What we in the movements, in this country and worldwide, achieved on the battlefield of struggle, what liberalism in its final forms has lost, it attempts to regain through theories that purport to come from the Left, but in fact are liberalism in new guise.

Let me end on the Leninist concept of philosophy as politics, and Platypus is a great example of this. I appreciate you all for this. We must find ways to actualize that understanding in the day-to-day lifeworlds of the masses. Philosophy belongs to the people; it does not belong to the academics. It is our task in this struggle, which is the final battle — we're on the right side; we're winning it — to undo liberalism, for democracy. The liberals are the obstacle to democracy, not its defenders.

Benjamin Studebaker: Liberalism makes three core claims. The first is the priority liberalism gives to the individual. For liberals, the individual is the primary unit of society. All social structures must be justified to the individual, and they can only be good, or desirable, insofar as they contribute to individual well-being. Individuals are autonomous, they have agency, and individuals are responsible for the things they do. Individuals who deny their agency or responsibility are acting inauthentically and have morally failed in some way.

The second is an affinity for markets. Liberals tend to think markets make better decisions than bureaucracies, patronage networks, families. They like markets because markets make productive decisions by aggregating individual decisions. Prices go up and down because individuals choose to buy or not to buy various products, and individuals make those choices autonomously, based on what they value. Liberals are uncomfortable with appeals to God, the common good, the good of the state, or the good of the family. It is hard to prove that these concepts and institutions benefit individuals. Liberals suspect that elites use these terms to bully people and to excuse unjust coercion — and when they say elites, they mean landed aristocrats. To varying degrees, they often suggest that God, the good, the state, and/or the family are oppressive.

The third is an emphasis on pluralism, on accepting people with diverse values. Lots of individuals value different things, and since these different values all come from different individuals with different desires and perspectives, liberals consider all of these desires and perspectives legitimate. As long as it emanates from the individual, bottom-up, they think it's okay.

Liberalism doesn't like it when individuals have values that invoke a top-down worldview. If you derive your values from abstract ideas like God, the good, the state, the class system, the family, you aren't starting with the individual. You have external sources of value, above yourself, that you answer to. Liberals think that this makes you dangerous. You won't like it when markets make decisions that conflict with your external source of value. You might feel that other people should answer to the same source of value as you do, and therefore you might get frustrated with pluralism too.

Unfortunately for liberals, it's not possible to make all decisions through the market and through the individual. This was very obvious to Max Weber, who explicitly argued that the liberal freedom to autonomously choose values for oneself depends on the existence of the state. Without a state, non-liberals will be able to destroy liberalism. Non-liberals are willing to use coercion to impose their top-down value systems on unwilling individuals. A liberal state protects liberalism from other value systems. To do this, the state not only needs an army, it needs a system of education. The state has to inculcate liberal values in young people so that when those young people participate in government, they use state power responsibly, to defend liberalism. Otherwise, Weber argues, politically immature citizens will commandeer the state and turn it to illiberal ends.

This means liberalism requires a state that strategically violates the liberal commitment to pluralism. The liberal commitment to individual freedom is expressed in part through the commitment to markets, so the liberal state will strategically violate its commitment to pluralism to defend the market too. When the liberal state is secure, it makes an effort to show that it is committed to pluralism. In the 90s, liberals like John Rawls went to great pains to argue that liberalism could include "reasonable people," who believe in God, the good, the state, and the family. But when the liberal state feels that liberalism is in danger, it tightens things up.

Because the liberal state is committed to pluralism, it erodes its own legitimacy when it is seen to violate pluralism. It must therefore find ways to violate pluralism without being seen to violate it. It does this by inducing private civil-society organizations to censor citizens on its behalf. During the Red Scare, being a Marxist in public wouldn't get you arrested, but it would make it hard for you to get a job, especially in institutions where you might have political or cultural influence.

This swinging between affirming and violating pluralism is a crisis that has been with liberalism from the beginning. It comes and goes in seasons. After the global economic crisis of 2008, we began sliding into a liberal winter. Liberalism got defensive, and it's been trying to diminish the space for non-liberal discussions, especially online.

The liberal's favorite way to violate pluralism is to accuse people who challenge individualism and the market of opposing pluralism. They love Karl Popper, and they love to use his paradox of tolerance to excuse their attacks on pluralism. They deny the possibility of non-liberal pluralism. If you don't agree with them about individualism and markets, you must be a fascist or a neo-reactionary, etc. And it's always okay to bash the fash, right?

Where do Marxists fit into this? Marx's theory of history suggests that capitalism is a necessary stage of development. During the capitalist stage, markets spread throughout society, breaking down top-down structures from the feudal era. They break down the church, traditional understandings of the good, traditional types of states, and traditional families. By corroding these structures and making them less effective, capitalism creates an institutional vacuum, which can then be filled by socialism.

Liberalism is necessary to get out of the old society, but it cannot be the end goal. Marx objects to the traditional form of society in large part because traditional societies involve the exploitation of slaves and serfs. Marx wants to free these traditional workers from these forms of domination. Liberalism ends slavery and serfdom, but the market still allows workers to be exploited. They need to work to survive. The fact that they need jobs forces them to agree to work for less than they otherwise would. The worker may not be the slave or serf of any particular person, but the worker depends on the labor market for survival. The market itself is their master.

If you blame the market for the fact that you're working for less than you feel your time is worth, you're blaming an abstract structure for a decision you made. For liberals, this means you're behaving inauthentically. You're denying your agency and responsibility for the choices you've made. If you argue that exploitation is bad, you're making the market answer to your understanding of the good. That involves submitting to an external value system — another illicit move. If you point out that the cost-of-living crisis is making it hard for people to have families, you're valuing the family — a nebulous abstraction — over a market system based on individual values. If you point out that many individuals value the family, or the good, or think it's important to take structures seriously, you're pressing up against the contradiction at the heart of liberalism.

Liberals can't win this argument straight-up, so they respond by accusing you of opposing pluralism and being some kind of totalitarian tankie fascist. To avoid being thrown in that basket of deplorables, Marxists respond by allying themselves with anarchists and progressive liberals.

This is a poisoned chalice. Anarchists are opposed to anything top-down, and that means they tend to affirm individualism. While they will happily oppose bosses, they like co-ops. Cooperative businesses still compete with each other in a market system, and they have to control their costs to stay in business. This means they have to exploit their members. They induce their workers to become their own bosses and each other's bosses. Co-ops are independent contractors plus peer pressure.

Progressive liberals are liberals. These Elizabeth Warren types aren't actually interested in getting beyond the market. They want to protect the market by making strategic concessions to workers. Workers who ally with them end up getting pushed around. They are told that they must vote for liberals to have any chance of getting any further concessions. If they don't comply, the progressive liberals try to frighten them, telling them that Right-wing parties will take past concessions away. To make matters worse, the progressive liberals take cultural stances that many workers find alienating. Marxists who refuse to embrace progressive cultural positions are accused of rejecting pluralism. Marxists who comply are cut off from the bulk of the working class.

Of course, if Marxists try to dialogue with social conservatives, who place emphasis on top-down abstractions, they are immediately accused of being totalitarian tankie fascists. Once Marxists are in that basket of deplorables, they can be socially ostracized at negligible political cost.

The liberal state puts Marxists in a tough position. They can accept being demonized as totalitarians, or they can ally with soft-Left factions that aren't interested in moving beyond the market. To escape this dilemma, Marxists need to advance a thoroughgoing Marxist, non-liberal form of pluralism. It may be possible to do this through small-r republicanism. There's potential in Bruno Leipold's "Citizen Marx" thesis.[1]

Spencer Leonard: I too am a former student at the University of Chicago, and being here makes me think of my old teachers, the most important of whom I had my last cup of coffee with on this campus. And this is the campus where I first made friends with Chris Cutrone and where Sunit Singh first asked me to help him read Hegel. I said we ought to invite my friend.

I'm going to go over some of the same ground the other panelists have covered, but hopefully with a different twist.

We are today in the midst of what appears a full-blown retreat from liberalism — or, rather, a simple rejection of it. Of course, the neoliberalism presently disintegrating was not itself liberal, but a form of state capitalism. Nevertheless, the Left follows capitalist politics in identifying neoliberalism with liberalism per se. Today's political crisis of neoliberalism appears as a crisis of liberalism, and is itself identified with capitalism. And it's shocking to witness the endless outrages to liberalism which form the daily news cycle. In the face of endless assaults upon civil liberties, constitutional rights, and indeed the rule of law under Biden, the question now poses itself: are the Democrats worse than the Republicans as regards the Bill of Rights? Are those installed by the DSA[2] Left in the vanguard of overcoming liberalism such as it was under neoliberalism? In this sense, inasmuch as the Republicans appear conservative, they thus credibly stand forth as defenders of a now-embattled liberalism, albeit a liberalism reduced to what it can never be, a tradition, even as they themselves under Trump insist upon renegotiating neoliberal trade agreements and back away from America's role as guarantor of the global liberal order. In short, they reject what they term "globalism," even as they reinterpret liberal freedom as a body of cultural or even religious values. So, the new militarism, police-surveillance state, racial re-segregation of society, government by executive order, disinformation from above, deprivation of livelihood in the name of public health and worker safety, and, in general, the seemingly wholesale rejection of the American revolutionary legacy — this appears today to be spearheaded by the "Left," otherwise known as the Democrats.

Speaking on a Platypus panel 13 years ago, I suggested that the Iranian Revolution was symbolic of the crisis of the Left. I wrote then that the Left in 1979 and after had proven itself "incapable of recognizing in Khomeini . . . a threat no less grave than the Shah himself had been."[3] There had been in the 1960s and 70s many delusions, expressed by figures such as Ali Shariati, respecting Islamic Marxism. But, even at my most polemical, I could never maintain that the Iranian Revolution was the victory of the Left. Rather, as James expressed it last night,[4] it was more a case of the Right carrying through the overthrow of a status quo that the Left had initiated, yet abandoned. The Ayatollah was the Iranian analog to Margaret Thatcher. Subjectively, as was discussed, it all appeared as a bewildering defeat. By contrast, today's pseudo-Left seems intent upon the wholesale rejection of the legacy of modern revolution, beginning with liberalism. If neoliberalism justified the forcible opening of labor markets to make room for the millions of women and black people demanding working-class jobs, demanding wage labor, in the 1970s and 80s — if liberalism seemed the ground upon which the Right would cash out those Leftist demands, just as it seemed to satisfy the demands of Solidarność and of the East German people for free movement — today's neo-social democracy, its new New Dealism, seems to demand the liquidation of the modern revolution, the replacement of rights and responsibilities with privileges, prerogatives, and obligations. If neoliberalism was demanded in the name of denazification, well . . .

In the U.S. today, the old New-Left-created or -revitalized sects, as well as academic Marxism (once justified as part of a "long march through the institutions") — even the old subcultural anarchism — have all seemingly been swept up into the Democratic Party. Precisely the worst of the Left has now been mainstreamed. It is idle to deny that the illiberal or woke Left is the Left today. There are precious few defenders of free speech, the right to bear arms, freedom from excessive bail and other cruel and unusual punishment, even of the rule of law rather than the dicta of whoever happens to be in authority, working people's hostility to taxes, and even the supremacy of elected civilian authority over the state bureaucracy and the military. And yet those few Left liberals or liberal Leftists, such as *SpikedOnline!* in the UK, seem now to have disavowed the legacy of socialism altogether. And those few renegades from the new progressive consensus, people who not too long ago would once have been thought garden-variety liberals, Gen X-ers like Glenn Greenwald and Matt Taibbi, are generally perceived as Right-wing. And it is improbable, to say the least, to think that the coming Republican wave will be a restoration of liberalism, at least as it was known in the Cold War period. In light of these matters, our present as history seems to be in freefall.

In short, while many norms and assumptions of the neoliberal era were brought to crisis through Donald Trump's takeover of the Republican Party and election to the presidency in 2016, it has been reserved to the Democrats and, among them, the progressives to mount an assault upon at least such liberalism as a broad political consensus once upheld in the United States during the postwar period, especially as this came to be politically reconfigured in the 1960s through the Civil Rights Movement, the Free Speech Movement, anti-anti-Communism, the anti-Vietnam War Movement, and the multiculturalism of the 1980s and 90s. In this sense, just as Reagan in an important sense cashed out the gains of the 1960s in the form of a neoliberal overcoming of mid-century racism and mid-century sexism by smashing the obstacles to a massive influx into the American labor force in the 1980s, so today the Republicans again seem, irony of ironies, to be upholding a certain "Okay, Boomer" legacy of the New Left against its self-professed legatees. Such is the latest fracturing or recombination of liberalism under conditions of capitalism. That is all to say, that I take this panel to be asking its questions against the background of the presently unfolding crisis of neoliberalism. Those questions are, "What is liberalism? Why is liberalism in crisis today and how long has it been in crisis? Why did Marx both take up and critique liberalism? What can we learn from that today? What is the relationship of Marxism to liberalism?"

I will propose a few short and fairly straightforward answers to these questions. They are straightforward inasmuch as they form the general assumptions of historical Marxism, that is the Marxism in the aftermath of whose collapse what passes for history has labored for the past century or so.

Liberalism is the modern philosophy of freedom that took shape during, and attempted consciously to direct, the modern revolution that first began to unfold itself unmistakably in the 17th century. It is not simply a matter of an antinomy of positive and negative liberties. Rather it sought to achieve a society in which — as Marx once put it — the freedom of each would serve as the precondition of the freedom of all. Liberalism in this sense has fallen into crisis in recent years, the past half century and more, for the period since the rise of Stalinism, fascism, and the New Deal, since the global October Revolution attempted an orderly retreat, and since 1848, at minimum. Arguably, it stretches back even further to the near-contemporary deaths of Benjamin Constant, Jeremy Bentham, and G. W. F. Hegel, as well as the founding of the modern Democratic Party and the presidency of Andrew Jackson, the birth of issue-based abolitionism, the July Revolution in France, and the passage of the Great Reform Bill in Great Britain. That is, we might say that the crisis of liberalism, understood as "bourgeois ideology" or the legacy of the Enlightenment and the bourgeois revolution, is the event that forms the background of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's adolescence and early adulthood. Prior to that, liberalism entered into crises to which a deepening of liberalism seemed the only adequate response. Thus, for instance, the high Enlightenment of the second half of the 18th century and the Enlightenment of Hegel were attempts to more adequately specify liberalism in the face of the crises of the British Revolution and the French Revolution, respectively.

The crisis of the modern revolution was what Marx and Engels were thinking through as young men. In specific terms, in the 1830s and, especially, in the 1840s, when the first global industrial crisis set in, the question posed itself: how to advance the project of modern freedom, announced by the Enlightenment and the bourgeois revolution, under these conditions? At the level of politics, the sign of the times was, above all, the emergence of socialism. At the level of ideology, it was the crisis of philosophy, of political thought, of political economy. In short, it was the crisis of liberalism. Marx and Engels shorthanded these signs of the times in the phrases "class struggle," "vulgar political economy," and "capital." In this sense, then, Marx and Engels did not "take up and critique liberalism." Rather, they recognized the crisis of liberalism unfolding before their eyes, and took it to be of a crisis comparable to that faced by Rousseau, Smith, and Kant, but with a twist.

They thus placed themselves within the tradition of the philosophes, but as philosophes of a Second Enlightenment, philosophes of the class struggle. The general expectation of Marx and Engels's generation was that the revolution that had, in living memory, found expression in America and France was soon to burst forth again, most likely in France, where it had been impossibly rolled back in the Restoration and prematurely aborted in the stabilization of the July Revolution. As a kind of parallel development to the aborted revolution that took place in Paris, the great and long-delayed reform of the British Parliament was widely felt to fall short of the tasks before it.

So, the class struggle politically announced the Industrial Revolution in the 1830s and 40s. Whether in the form of English Chartism in Britain or on the Continent, in the more disparate revolts of the Lyon silkweavers, the Silesian weavers, etc., Marx and Engels, like others of their generation, registered well before 1848 both the reemergence and transformation of the revolutionary republican spirit. As Marx remarked in 1852, he was part of a wider recognition: "no credit is due to me for discovering the existence of classes in modern society or the struggle between them."[5] The next revolution of the revolution would be a democratic upheaval, would be accompanied by a dramatic reassertion of what the journalists at that time called "the social question." In consequence, this time the revolution would not be deflected from its purpose, as it had been in the past, as Engels put it. The next recurrence of the French Revolution would have a social character that would overthrow the form of society itself and usher in communism. As Engels wrote in 1847 in answer to the question "What will be the course of the revolution?":

> [I]n the first place, it will inaugurate a democratic constitution and thereby, directly or indirectly, the political rule of the proletariat. Directly in England, where the proletariat already constitutes the majority of the people. Indirectly in France and in Germany, where the majority of the people consists not only of proletarians but also of small peasants and urban petty bourgeois, who are only now being proletarianized and in all their political interests are becoming more and more dependent on the proletariat and therefore soon will have to conform to the demands of the proletariat. This will perhaps involve a second fight, but one that can only end in the victory of the proletariat.[6]

Going into the Revolution of 1848, Marx and Engels were democrats, though they already realized that the new democratic current, socialism, threatened to fall beneath the threshold of liberalism. That is, they already distanced themselves from a certain crude communism that simply saw the class struggle as the capitalists' fault. For them, the capitalist class was not simply the new aristocracy. Their denial of work to millions was not the cause of society's crisis, but its result. The class struggle was a symptom of the proletarianization of liberal freedom. Marx and Engels's sense of inadequacy of the new democratic currents to the demand of liberalism — not just for justice, but for change — sharpened and deepened over the course of the Revolution of 1848. The experience of democratic counterrevolution in the form of Bonapartism provoked the immanent dialectical critique of democracy. The working class had to take power to prosecute the task of the democratic revolution, which otherwise threatened the opposite of change or, rather, change as the mask of the persistence of the same old same old. The task of the democratic